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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 002763

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AF FOR A/S FRAZER AND DAS YAMAMOTO FROM CHARGE HUDDLESTON

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TAGS: [ET](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: PM MELES: ETHIOPIA WILL CONTAIN THE ISLAMIC COURTS  
BY FORCE IF NO UNSC ACTION

Classified By: CHARGE VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Theresa Whelan met with Prime Minister Meles, Minister of State Tekeda and Defense Chief of Staff Samora on October 10. Whelan was accompanied by DATT Col. Zedler, OSD Rep Lt. Col. Atallah and myself. Meles argued that the best way to contain the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) and stop its momentum was with physical force that could then lead to serious discussion. Lifting the arms embargo on Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and deploying a Ugandan battalion or even a smaller force would secure Baidoa while Ethiopian forces trained the TFG troops. Meles indicated that if the international community failed to act by the end of Ramadan, Ethiopia would likely be forced to confront the CIC at Beledwyne, a town about 12 miles from Ethiopia's border and on the road to the Ethiopian Somali regional capital of Gode. Ethiopia had informed the CIC that it had two red-lines that must not be crossed. One was Baidoa and the other Beledwyne. The CIC had taken a town next to Beledwyne in order to suck Ethiopia into a conflict and derail prospects of an IGAD/Ugandan peacekeeping mission to Baidoa, Meles said. If the UN acted promptly and approved the deployment of the Ugandans, then Ethiopia would show restraint. If the UNSC failed to act, Ethiopia would establish a buffer zone on the border and reinforce Baidoa. It would not move its troops deep into Somalia; Ethiopia would be "restrained" and its strategy would be a "holding action" to deter the CIC, Mele claimed. Containing the CIC at this point would break its momentum and allow moderates and clans to pull away from the hard-line CIC Islamist leadership. If the CIC is not contained, Meles said, it will devour all of Somalia and attempt to destabilize Ethiopia, given the large presence of Ethiopian insurgents and the backing of Eritrea for the CIC. Whelan indicated that she doubted that there would be funding for the IGASOM mission and suggested that perhaps the international community could warn the CIC not to expand further. Meles asked that the US express dismay but not condemn Ethiopia if the UNSC does not approve the IGAD mission and Ethiopian forces deploy to Beledwyne, since Ethiopia would be acting in its own self defense. Meles promised again to let us know of any significant troop movements in advance. End summary.

12. (C) Comment: From embassy's vantage point, the lifting of the arms embargo on the TFG and the deployment of a small IGAD/Ugandan force could prevent an Ethiopian counter attack on Beledwyne and possibly a wider war. At a minimum, the partial lifting of the arms embargo soon, along with an international statement telling the CIC that further expansion is unacceptable, would demonstrate the international community's commitment to the TFG and might

force the CIC to the negotiating table. In order to convince Ethiopia that it should not attack the CIC in Beledwyne, the international community will need to take action that will allow the TFG - as well as Puntland and Somaliland -- to survive and Ethiopia to be secure from infiltration by insurgents. The package Meles wants is the partial lifting of the embargo and a small IGAD/Ugandan battalion in Baidoa. An even more minimal package would be partial lifting of the arms embargo, an international statement, and resumed talks between the TFG and CIC, possibly including Puntland and Somaliland. Meles is convinced that a Somalia led by CIC leader Aweys -- now made even more dangerous by the growing Al Shabab terrorist -- is pursuing regime change in Ethiopia as well as in Somalia. As the CIC grows in strength, Meles must necessarily begin to calculate at what point will he be forced to fight while he can still win. The TPLF Congress has made it clear that the Government will deal harshly with illegal activities and address Eritrea's pressure on Ethiopia via Somalia by dealing with the local insurgents. This means that as long as Ethiopia is threatened externally it will react harshly to internal challenges it considers illegal. At the same time, the TPLF Congress agreed that the Government had not done enough on governance and should improve its performance on civil society, democracy and capacity building. If the insurgents gain the upper hand, it will be difficult to maintain momentum for creating internal political space. Already hundreds of OLF, ONLF, and AIAI insurgents fighting with the CIC are moving into Ethiopia's Ogaden region. The Somalis have failed to stop the CIC, if the international community fails as well, Ethiopia will do it -- or attempt to do it. End comment.

13. (U) This cable was not cleared by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Theresa Whelan.

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14. (C) PM Meles told DAS Whelan that the objective of the CIC is to rule all of Somalia by whatever means possible, including talks in Khartoum, subversive activities, and the force of arms. If the CIC takes control of Somalia, it will not be a force for stability. The jihadist base of the CIC will expand into a jihadist state. This, Meles said, is illustrated by the fact that those fighting with the CIC -- Eritrea, OLF, ONLF, and AIAI -- want to destabilize Ethiopia. Ethiopia is portrayed as the enemy of Islam and the "Israel of the region"; at the beginning of Ramadan, the CIC declared a jihad against Ethiopia. The PM argued that the hard line CIC leadership under Aweys is an arch enemy of Ethiopia, and it is this leadership that controls the outside funding, arms and training that are fueling the CIC successes in Kismayo and along the Ethiopian/Somali border. In Meles' view, these recent victories mean that the only way the CIC can be stopped is if it loses momentum; clan and ideological difference will then separate factions and break apart the CIC.

15. (C) According to Meles, physical force must be combined with talks because the CIC will only negotiate when forced to do so. Meles said the best option is for the Somalis -- the TFG, Puntland, and Somaliland -- to themselves stop the CIC. So far the Somalis have been unable to do so, however, and will not be able to do so unless the TFG is strengthened by a partial lifting of the arms embargo. This would permit the deployment of a peacekeeping force that would provide security in Baidoa while Ethiopia trains the TFG's 5,000 troops. According to General Samora, Ethiopia has two force protection/training teams in Baidoa numbering from 70 to 100 and one training team in Puntland. If a Ugandan battalion provided security in Baidoa, the Ethiopians could train greater numbers of TFG troops. Samora estimated that within three months the TFG would be in a position to defend itself. Meles estimated that the Ugandan battalion would be needed for about six to nine months and that it would arrive with

only small arms. General Samora said that it was not the intention of the Ugandan forces to use Kismayo as an entry point, contrary to claims by the CIC; rather, these troops would be air lifted directly to Baidoa or travel from Kampala via Moyale to Baidoa. The Ethiopians would provide all the heavy weapons and back-up, should the Ugandans be attacked. The price tag suggested by the Ugandans appeared to be high, given that they will need only lodging, food, and per diem, according to Samora.

16. (C) Meles argued that the strategy of the CIC is to suck Ethiopia into a war because the CIC believes that the international community will rally against Ethiopia. The CIC propaganda that Ethiopians will serve as a rally point for Somalis to attack the TFG is wrong. Ethiopia has had excellent relations with Somalis over the last ten years. When Ethiopian troops entered Somalia to back up Baidoa, the Somali population did not reject their presence. Samora pointed out that over 200,000 Somalis live in Addis Ababa and many travel to Somalia; Ethiopia has been far more welcoming than other neighboring countries. (Comment: it is ironic that the majority of Ethiopians who are currently in Somalia - seemingly without problems - are fighting for the CIC! End comment.) The presence of the IGAD/Ugandan peacekeepers would be an ideal way to contain the CIC and reinforce the TFG, but it is not happening fast enough, Meles complained. As a result, the CIC is trying to preempt IGAD by gaining momentum through successful occupation of Kismayo and border towns.

17. (C) Meles pointed out that the CIC has crossed one of Ethiopia's two "red-lines", which are Baidoa and Beledwyne. The CIC has taken Kaliber, a small town close to Beledwyne located nine miles from the Ethiopian town of Ferfer on the road to Gode, a regional capital of Ethiopia's Somali region. "This puts US in a spot," Meles said. "If we don't respond, we will be seen as bluffing. But if we act, then we will subvert the IGAD peacekeeping mission." Meles said that the CIC knows that Baidoa and Beledwyne are red lines, but moved ahead to provoke Ethiopia. He said he is worried that the CIC might imagine that Ethiopia is not reacting because of pressure from the international community, and will therefore continue to expand. Still, Meles said, Ethiopia is ready to refrain from an attack on the CIC at Beledwyne in the expectation of an IGAD package. Meles said that Ethiopia could use Ramadan as an excuse not to confront the CIC over Beledwyne, but would have to ask the US and the UK to speed up (UNSC work on the arms embargo and IGASOM.) Once Ramadan

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was over, Ethiopia would have to act, Meles warned.

18. (C) While awaiting action on partial lifting of the arms embargo and approval of an IGASOM, Ethiopia has taken precautionary measures, Meles said. The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is protecting the bridge at Luk on the road from the border to Baidoa. As in the past, Ethiopian forces will move into the staging ground behind Baidoa to protect it from a CIC assault. The ENDF is building up its forces in Ferfer and on the border. So, Meles warned, "after Ramadan we will be ready to act if the UNSC fails to act and Uganda doesn't arrive. If we move militarily, we will reinforce Baidoa and train and equip the TFG in Baidoa and then withdraw. We will also be prepared to disrupt the CIC movement into Puntland and Somaliland. We have some troops in Galacayo now. If we move toward Beledwyne, then this would be a thorn in the back of the CIC as it moves on Puntland. We would not go further than Beledwyne and then return," Meles claimed. Stopping the CIC movement will encourage clans to fall out of the CIC orbit, including possibly Kismayo. The GOE's objective would be containment of the CIC, not a military movement beyond setting up a buffer on the border and reinforcing Baidoa and Puntland, the PM explained. This strategy was reinforced by State Minister Tekeda's observation that Ethiopia is urging an alliance among the TFG, Puntland and Somaliland. Ethiopia's position

on Somaliland has already shifted toward more accommodation on some kind of autonomy.

¶9. (C) When Meles said that Ethiopia could avoid a confrontation with the CIC if the Ugandans were to provide security for Baidoa, DAS Whelan asked how that would work; wouldn't there be the same scenario, she asked? Meles replied that Ethiopia would have to restrain itself and not take the CIC out of Beledwyne. But the CIC would understand that Ethiopia's actions were dictated by its cooperation with the international community and not as weakness. Whelan then asked if it would not be tempting for the CIC to attack the Ugandans. Meles replied that the CIC would test the Ugandans, but that if there were an attack, Ethiopian troops could legitimately come to their rescue. Ethiopia and Uganda had worked well together in Sudan and could do so in Somalia. Whelan pressed Meles, pointing out that already the CIC apparently feared Ethiopian power because they had backed down on attacking Baidoa. Given this scenario, why was Uganda's presence in Baidoa necessary, she queried? Meles said, "It is not enough; the CIC will devour all of Somalia because they are succeeding and that allows them to gain momentum. They must be stopped before they become too powerful."

¶10. (C) Whelan pointed out that if the problem was simply the difference between an Ethiopian and African Union (AU) flag in Baidoa, the TFG could put up an AU flag as the AU had given its blessing to the IGASOM. Funding is a problem, she pointed out, because of Darfur and Liberia. It appeared that a smaller Ugandan force could probably do the job because it seemed that Meles' desire was principally a show of support by the region and AU for the TFG, given that Ethiopia would provide the real support/backup for the peacekeeping mission.

Meles replied that he hoped that we would find some way to help. Whelan replied that the Ugandan/IGAD mission was difficult for the US and we would have to make hard choices. She asked Meles if Uganda was really willing to support the TFG, especially as it appeared that the government might be returning to combat with the Lord's Resistance Army. Meles said that he believes that President Museveni would provide the forces if he asks, but financing for maintenance and per diem would be required.

¶11. (C) If there were no financing of IGAD, the anti-CIC forces would lose momentum to the Islamists, shifting odds against them, Meles warned. Nonetheless, he hoped that the US and its friends would not send the wrong signal to the Islamists should Ethiopia confront them in Beledwyne or Baidoa. Meles pointed out that the CIC likely will expect the US and others to condemn Ethiopia, but Ethiopia would be acting in its own national interest. "We hope you won't misunderstand in Washington, we are not trying to bamboozle you," Meles said. Whelan asked if Ethiopia's actions -- establishing a buffer zone and securing Baidoa -- would not speak for themselves. Meles said that the sensational media could prove unhelpful, as they were not interested in the facts but just the ideology. Unfortunately, the media seemed to ignore Aweys while portraying Ethiopia as doing America's dirty work, or alternatively leading America astray with

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tales of jihadists. The CIC is doing an excellent job of spinning its story, Meles concluded.

¶12. (C) Meles reiterated that the best way forward was to convince the Somali people that the CIC was not going to win.

Whelan pointed out that if the Ugandan/IGAD can not deploy because of lack of funding, then it might be prudent for Ethiopia to obtain the AU's support for any proposed intervention. If the AU considers it legitimate for Ethiopia to respond to a CIC probe of the Ugandans in Baidoa, would the AU not see it as legitimate for Ethiopia to respond should the Ugandans not be there? Meles responded that the AU would not condemn Ethiopia's actions, but it was probably not prudent for the AU to actively support Ethiopia, given

the history of misunderstandings in Somalia. But if IGAD were in Baidoa, then it would be different, as the AU would be expected to back it. Whelan then asked if it would stop the CIC if the US, EU, and AU publicly endorsed Ethiopia's redlines of Beledwyne and Baidoa. She asked if it would be helpful if the international community made a statement that the CIC should not expand beyond its current borders, as this would be seen as a threat, and pursue discussions with the TFG. Meles replied that such a statement was unlikely to stop CIC probes. If Ethiopia must act alone, Meles asked that the US express its dismay, but not dissatisfaction. I asked that Meles continue to inform US of any significant Ethiopia troop movement. Meles said that we would be informed in advance.

HUDDLESTON